Amy Kirio, a demon amidst demons

Literature and Pop Culture :

Villains in fiction

Introduction

Welcome to demon school Iruma-kun !, or *Mairimashita! Iruma-kun*, is a manga written and drawn by the author Osamu Nishi. With a weekly release that started in Japan in 2017, it has today 41 volumes and is still ongoing. The manga features a young human, Iruma, who was sold for a few pennies by greedy and unscrupulous parents to a powerful and eccentric demon who wishes to make him his spoiled grandson. From then on, the teenager will have to live in a new world inhabited by creatures known for their violent and bloodthirsty reputation - demons - all the while hiding his true nature so as to not get eaten. Among others, he'll have to join one of the most prestigious schools of the demon world, Babyls, where he, as a human without any magic, will struggle to find his place in a world ruled by a hierarchical system of ranks, going from 1 (the weakest) to 10 (the strongest).

Beneath its appearance of a classical coming-of-age story in another world, *Welcome to demon school Iruma-kun!* easily manages to reuse cliches overused in the *shônen nekketsu*[1] genre, for comic as well as narrative purposes, resulting in a sincere reflection on self-assertion, on the crucial role of education in the development of youth and on the genre itself. This use of genre's codes and cliches will of course not spare the serie's main antagonist, Kirio Amy, third-year student at Babyls, initially introduced as the leader and only member of the Magical Tools Research Club ("Battler") Iruma and his friends will join pretty soon in the story. In fact, he will even take a malicious pleasure in playing with the recurring tropes of villains in fiction.

A character who plays with the villain's tropes

"A wolf in sheep's clothing"

The phrase "wolf in sheep's clothing" is an idiom originating from the Bible and warning against the dangers of duplicitous people, hiding behind a harmless look, malicious intentions and cruelty. Since then, this idiom has been used in many different fields, but most notably took an important place in fiction to refer to sweet-looking characters with hidden motives, like for example Dawn Bellwether in *Zootopia*.

During his first appearance (Vol 3, ch 19), Kirio was shown as a frail character, and even more than harmless, mistreated and marginalized by other demons because of his weak constitution and his especially low rank despite him being a third-year and coming from a relatively powerful family. Rank Beth[2] (2), he often appears spitting blood, as a running joke, as soon as he uses an ounce of magic. Able, like the other demons of his bloodline, to create invisible walls, he can only maintain them a few seconds if really focused, and even in those cases, they're still very weak. Even on an extra-diegetic level, he's introduced as the "demon without magic" by the title of chapter 20. He therefore quickly draws sympathy both from the main character, who at this point in the story is still in a weak position and faces similar problems due to his natural lack of magic, and from the reader, who can't help but sympathize with the unfair treatment he receives due to his position in the demonic hierarchy.

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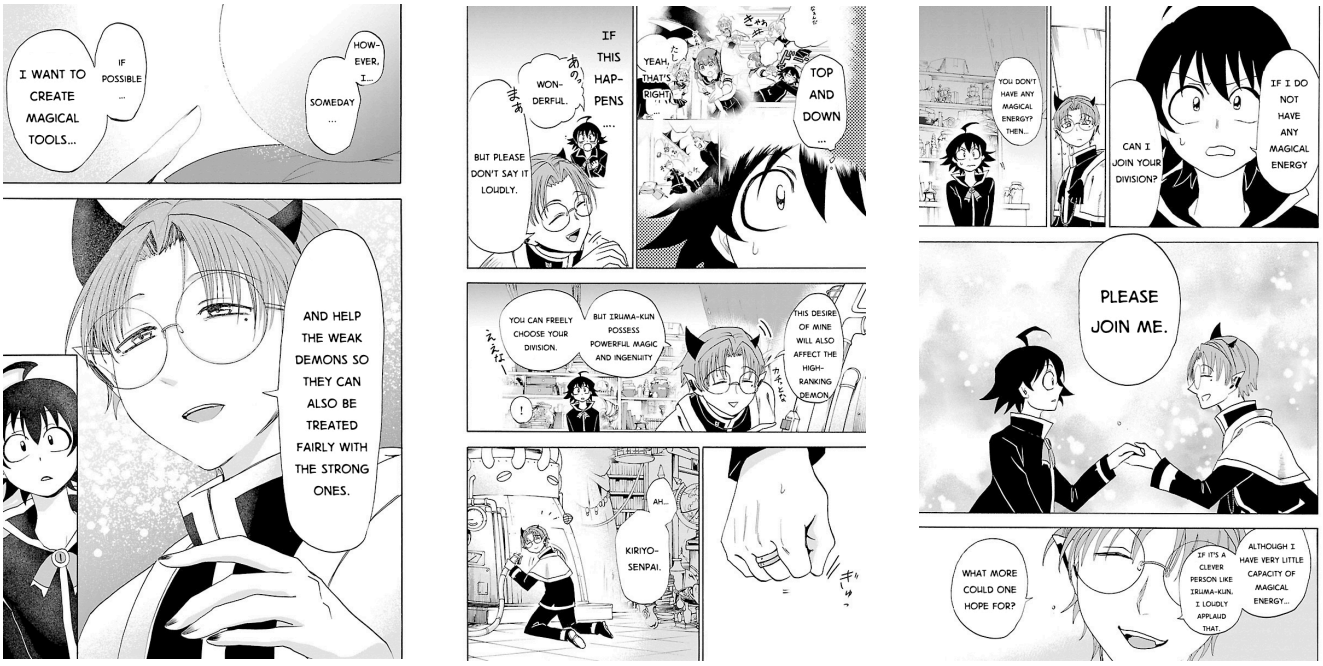
[1] Typical Japanese storytelling device involving the hero's gradual journey from the mundane to the extraordinary.

[2] The rank system is directly inspired by the Hebrew alphabet and numbering, taking the first 10 letters (associated with numbers) to record the value of the demons.


I WANT TO CREATE MAGICAL TOOLS...
IF POSSIBLE ...
SOMEDAY ...
HOW-EVER, I...
AND HELP THE WEAK DEMONS SO THEY CAN ALSO BE TREATED FAIRLY WITH THE STRONG ONES.
WON-DERFUL.
IF THIS HAP-PENS ....
BUT PLEASE DON'T SAY IT LOUDLY.
YEAH, THAT'S RIGHT!
TOP AND DOWN ...
YOU CAN FREELY CHOOSE YOUR DIVISION.
BUT IRUMA-KUN POSSESS POWERFUL MAGIC AND INGENUITY
THIS DESIRE OF MINE WILL ALSO AFFECT THE HIGH-RANKING DEMON.
AH...
KIRIYO-SENPAI.
YOU DON'T HAVE ANY MAGICAL ENERGY? THEN..
CAN I JOIN YOUR DIVISION?
IF I DO NOT HAVE ANY MAGICAL ENERGY
PLEASE JOIN ME.
WHAT MORE COULD ONE HOPE FOR?
IF IT'S A CLEVER PERSON LIKE IRUMA-KUN, I LOUDLY APPLAUD THAT.
ALTHOUGH I HAVE VERY LITTLE CAPACITY OF MAGICAL ENERGY...

However, he doesn't keep his mask on for long, since only a few chapters later, he reveals his true motivations, though only to the reader. Behind a frail appearance and a sincere idealism for the demon world, Kirio actually hides a personality far beyond moral standards, even for a demonic society. Inhabited by sadistic and destructive tendencies, he belongs to a marginal category of demons called those who "returned to origins", demons who wants to embrace their true demonic nature and who take pleasure in the suffering, despair and misfortune of others. So, if he in fact wants to destroy the hierarchy of his world, it's not because he yearns for an egalitarian and fair society, but all the contrary because he wants to go back to the chaos of ancient times. This is how he'll end up later in the story collaborating with a terrorist group, the Six Fingers, and attempt in the fourth volume, amongst many other things, to blow up the school with all the students locked inside thanks to his magic (made stronger by accumulating it for years in a magic tool), a plan that will be foiled by Iruma.

As such, Kirio embraces completely the "wolf in sheep's clothing" trope, using his frail look and low rank to make the reader, and all the other characters including the protagonist, drop their guard.

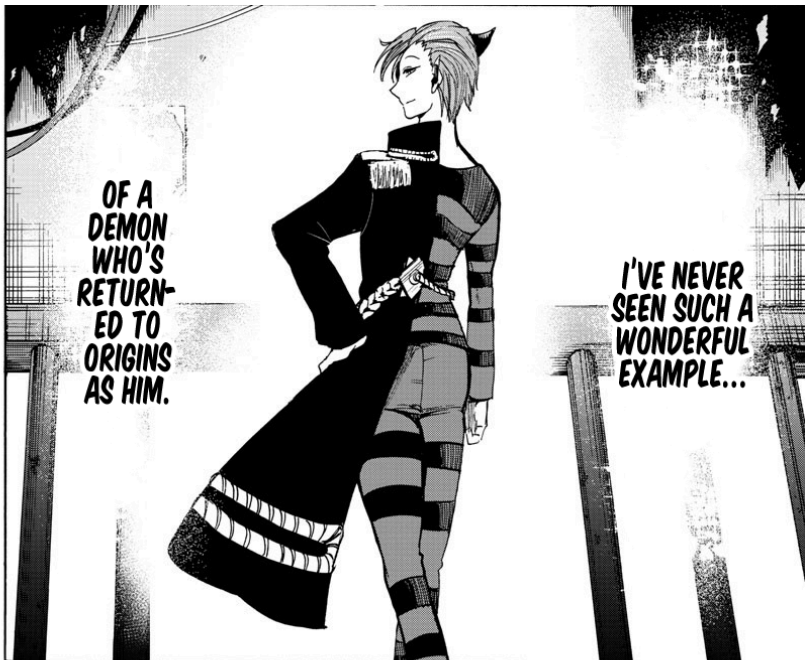
THAT'S WHY,
YOU CAN'T HEAR ANY SHRIEKS OR BELLOWS...
IT'S SO SOFT IT MAKES ME WANT TO VOMIT...
I,
SHINE!
THAT IS MY AM-BITION.
TOGETHER WITH THOSE WHO ARE THE SAME AS ME IN THE MAGIC TOOL DIVISION, WILL RETURN THAT FORMER CHAOS TO THIS WORLD.

THAT MAKE UP THE DEMON WORLD.
KIRIO, WE'RE GOING TO ABOLISH THE RANKS
EVERYONE HAS TO OBEY THOSE ABOVE THEM. BUT IF WE TURN THOSE STAIRS INTO CLIFFS...
I GOT GOOSE-BUMPS.
INDEED, BECAUSE THE RANKS ARE LIKE STAIRS,
THAT WOULD BE
CHAOS.

A "dark past" that excuses or explains his actions?

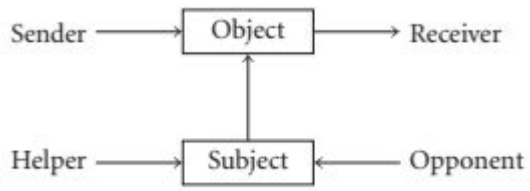
Fully embracing his villain in a fiction role, Kirio doesn't forget to talk about his past and explain his evil plan, like any cliche antagonist would do, to a paralysed protagonist. It is at this very moment that we get to know the unfairness he went through throughout his life because of his natural weakness in this hierarchical system. Seen as the shame of his family, bullied by other demons when he was in a school for « bad demons », and unable to help his only friend when she was in need, all the elements were there to make him a redeemable villain with whom the readers could sympathize, and this attack on the school could have been perceived as a simple misconduct from a misunderstood character the protagonist could have brought back on the right track.

However, the author completely turns over the trope. When this type of flashback is usually used, at best, to legitimize the villain's did, at least explain them, here, it only takes the reader by surprise by revealing the character's sadistic tendencies, when he would rather expect Kirio to feel some guilt over his past. Because Kirio is not a redeemable villain, he is, naturally, because of his demonic nature, nothing but pure evil.



Self-proclaimed antagonist

Kirio Amy is therefore inescapably a villain in the moral meaning of the world , but also in an actantial way due to his opposition to the protagonist. What makes this opposition interesting is its uniterality, on the side of Kirio, because Iruma, even after hearing his true nature, keeps wanting to restore their friendship, keeping a place for him in the club he was once leading before his arrest. But if Kirio does in fact often think about Iruma, it's in a whole different way. If one wants to rekindle a lost friendship, the other seeks actively to break him physically and psychologically (especially after discovering the hero's human nature). Hence, « Natural enemy » or « nemesis » are words he directly uses to refer to him, thus placing himself as an opponent to the main character, following the classic actantial model.



In a sense, this model is taken to the extreme, as not only Kirio insist on proclaiming himself as his only enemy, the only person who's allowed to drive him to despair (even lashing onto his allies when they attack him), but the story also adds to this a fated facet. The

same way the protagonist refers to his closest friends as his “soulmates”, Kirio sees in Iruma’s fortuitous involvement in the repeated failure of his plan (he never actively tries to thwart his actions, it’s always just the result of coincidences) a sign of destiny.

ONCE AGAIN YOU RUIN MY PLAN... THIS... MUST BE...
WHY... ARE YOU HERE? WERE YOU THE ONE WHO DEFEATED THE BEASTS?
DES-TINY...!!
NOTHING LESS THAN
REALLY ARE MY...
YOU...
AAH, IRUMA-KUN... I KNEW IT...

BUT, WE WILL MEET AGAIN
SINCE YOU ARE...
IT'S PERFECT NOW THAT YOU'RE BACK
TO ACHIEVE OUR AMBITION... TO SPREAD CHAOS IN OUR EVERY ACTION, WE STILL NEED THAT WARPED MIND OF YOURS.
YES
TODAY... IS NOT THE DAY.

Mirroring antagonist and protagonist

Lastly, he wouldn’t be a true antagonist to this story’s main character if we couldn’t find in him some parallel with Iruma. Some of them were already mentioned, like the fact that when they first met, both of them were of low rank (by then, Iruma is Aleph, rank 1), but there’s actually a lot more, starting with the way both of them are dependant on a magic tool for their magic, Kirio to accumulate his, Iruma to collect other’s so he can use it. Moreover, even though Iruma almost never talks about his past so as to not give away his humanity, they both were subject to abuse and neglect from their family (at least before the hero was adopted by the demon), and with their respective marginality at school, it is no wonder they got so close so quickly and that Iruma’s fondness for him persists despite Kirio’s actions.

Nevertheless, these parallels are counterbalanced by some elements that oppose them diametrically, the most evident being their nature. Human and demon, prey and predator in some cases, master and familiar in others, even if the power dynamic seems uneven at first sight, but the protagonist’s resolution and determination who appears, unfortunately for Kirio, almost unbreakable when faced with despair, manages to even things out.

INSIDE THIS LITTLE BOX.
AND THEN I COULD WATCH YOU FALL INTO DESPAIR
IN FEAR.
TREMBLE AND COWER
I THOUGHT WE COULD WATCH IT TOGETHER!
THE REASON I INVITED YOU INTO THIS ROOM WAS BECAUSE ...
SINK INTO HOPE-LESSNESS
AS AZU-SAN, CLARA-CHAN, AND EVERY-THING YOU HOLD DEAR,
BREAKS DOWN AND DISA-PPEARS.
SHOW ME YOUR
IT'S FINE.
I DON'T MIND IF YA RESENT ME, YOU CAN EVEN HIT ME.
SO PLEASE
DESPAIRING FACE...
HUH
STRIDE
EH
EH!?
STAND
ALRIGHT! I'VE DECIDED!
BAM
HEY HEY HEY WAIT A MINUTE!!
WHOOPSIE DAISY.
YEP.
PARDON ME.
YOU'LL LOSE THINGS IMPORTANT TO YOU! NOT A SPECK WILL REMAIN!
ALL 'CAUSE OF SOMETHIN' YOU MADE!
DIDYA NOT HEAR ME? THE SCHOOL IS GONNA EXPLODE, YA KNOW?
WHY
WHY
SO WHY AREN'T YOU IN DESPAIR?!
I'VE PUSHED YOU SO FAR,
NOTHING GOOD WILL COME OF IT.
BECAUSE EVEN IF I DESPAIR,

I'VE EXPERIENCED COUNTLESS DIFFICULTIES SINCE I WAS BORN,
ENOUGH THAT IT'S INGRAINED IN MY BODY.
!?
KIRIO HAD
I HAVE TO TAKE ACTION.
I CAN'T SURVIVE OFF IT, EITHER.
NOTHING WILL CHANGE IF I DESPAIR.
AND AMBITIOUS, AS WELL.
EXCELLING IN DEFENCE
MEEK
ALWAYS CONSIDERED IRUMA-KUN AND HIMSELF TO BE SIMILAR.
BUT HE WAS WRONG.
I'VE ALWAYS AVOIDED DANGER UNTIL NOW ...
BUT AFTER COMING TO THE DEMON WORLD, I'VE COME TO LEARN ABOUT FACING CHALLENGES.
CRACKLE
THAT'S WHY I WON'T RUN, EVEN IF SENPAI IS 'EVIL'.
AND THE BOY WHO IS ACCUSTOMED TO DESPAIR.
THE BOY WHO WANTS TO CAUSE DESPAIR
HIS NATURAL ENEMY!!
THIS GUY IS
BA-THUMP

Character design analysis

Physical asymmetry and psychological instability

This double personality, sadism hidden under mask of weakness and kindness, is actually visible in his design, especially the one he arbores during his first appearances. Just like the wolf wearing a sheep's costume to coax his prey, Kirio adorns at first a very normal appearance, at least for the reader who got used to the other demons along the volumes. A human-like body if not for the horns, pointed ears and teeth, tail and, even if they're not shown most of the time, bat wings, this is what the avrage extra demon, those who're part of

the background and don't have any relevance in the story, looks like, and Kirio checks all the boxes. With this, he has an air of model student with his well fitted uniform and his round glasses, and even more so with his cape which gives him an aura of frailty. As such, on top of the personality he was showing at the beginning, before the twist, it's easy for the reader to trust him, even more so since at this point of the story, there's not been a single truly evil demon.

Nonetheless, we can still discern some little hints about the character's true instability. Uneven horns, results of the donation of one of them to his friend as an apology, as he explains upon telling us about his past, a beauty spot which, with its placement[3], breaks the symmetry of his face, and those glasses, an object commonly used in drawing and animation for characters with hidden intentions (the reflection acting as a barrier against what we often call the "mirror of the soul").

This instability becomes even more visible when he lets go of his mask. He doesn't wear his glasses anymore, assuming his true intentions, his "soul", he opens his uniforme's collar, pulls back his hair so as to cover his smaller horn, and puts in the spotlight his demonic characteristics. His white cape is now covering only one shoulder, therefore attracting the attention on his back, and thus his wings (which will tear off his clothes much later in the story by the way), his choker on his throat (important reminder when we find out he wants to eat Iruma), and his new haircut not only on his pointed ears but also on the other horn poking out and looking even bigger than before.

[3] It would be interesting to compare the placement of the beauty mark with the significance of the moles in makeup, in this case the Passionate, which would reveal his obsessive, fanatical character, literally hungry.

Color choice and symbolism

The symbolism around the colors is not trivial either, and is even an echo to the complex relationship between the antagonist and protagonist. Both of them are characterized by the color blue, but where Iruma's is a more classic blue, reassuring but bright, showing all the while his purity and kindness and his determination and energy, whereas Kirio's is more of a teal, so a blue with a hint of green, a chemically unstable color associated with the dangerous versatility of nature, and thus to misfortune and evil. Even if the green is also associated with a lot of other characters, like of the main character's best friend, Clara Valac, hers is assumed and much softer, indicating her chaotic and unpredictable but kind behavior. With Kirio, the green is insidious, hidden, like a lurking danger we don't notice at first sight.

Another color that stands out, except the teal, is the purple, symbolizing here mysticism, magic and power. Signature color of the demon world (we find it literally everywhere), it's used in his case to highlight once again his demonic characteristic (his ears and throat) with his jewelleries and nails, as if to always remind us that under his candid human-like appearance, a cruel monster, a demon in every sense of the world, is hiding.

Conclusion

Consequently, Amy Kirio is an antagonist who plays with the fictional villain's codes so as to better twist them. Thanks to his frail appearance (though filled with hints on his true psyche) and a friendly behavior, he manages to deceive the characters as well as the readers before revealing a dark personality, deeply sadistic and ravaging. When many antagonists from contemporary fictions reveal a painful past to make the reader empathize and or sympathize, this character breaks completely the trope of the redeemable villain, because his evilness is neither an accident nor the consequences of an unfair society that is clearly and

openly criticized on several occasion in the story, his evilness directly comes from his essence, from natural urges to spread chaos and despair.

Kirio is a villain who, because of his intentional opposition to Iruma, exceed the simple protagonist-antagonist relationship, going as far as to claim himself as his natural enemy, the only nemesis allowed to do hurt him and make in fall into despair, all the while the hero embodies a resilient strength (almost) unbreakable, a duality enforced by the fated facet surrounding all their meetings throughout the story.

Hero's inverted reflection, he's not just a simple opponent to him. While Iruma seeks by all means a way to truly become part of this new society he learns to discover little by little at first, then a way to improve it for the weakest people, Kirio rejects it completely for his individual urge to see people suffer. These different conception of the world are not dissimilar to Rousseau's social contract, an opposition between a well ordonned and fair society thanks to the collective adherence to a social pact so as to ensure the common good, and a world where the individual is king, where a return to nature is advocated and where personal impulses dictate the conduct of all. Ultimately, Kirio is neither a likeable nor liked character (or when he is, it's for his entertaining nature, for the tension he brings to the story). He's a perverse character, with deviant morals even in a society that might seem to accept them. By his desire to harm a child, Iruma, the very embodiment of innocence in the work, he is bound to earn the contempt of the reader, who places himself in an almost parental position of protection.